



Press Release

Public Affairs Office
Commander, U.S. Fleet Forces Command
1562 Mitscher Avenue,
Suite 250
Norfolk, Va. 23551-2487
(757) 836-3600
Fax: (757) 836-3601

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Sailors help Community Walk Out of Darkness

By Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Jonathan Donnelly

It kills every 14 minutes. It doesn't discriminate by race, gender, age, wealth or poverty. Suicide is an equal opportunity killer.

In an attempt to increase awareness for the issue of suicide, military members, including about 85 Navy volunteers, and civilians gathered Sept. 7 for the eighth annual Out of Darkness walk in Virginia Beach, Va.

Sailors and veterans arrived early to help set up information centers, booths for on-site counseling, water stations and first-aid sites. More than 5,000 people attended the event, which focused on raising awareness of depression as a way to prevent suicide, remembering lost loved ones and celebrating good mental health.

"It is absolutely incredible to me that in the United States of America a person dies by suicide about every 14 minutes; claiming about 38,000 lives a year," said Virginia Beach Mayor Bill Sessoms. "This is unacceptable; it breaks my heart, and we must do something about it."

Sessoms told the crowd that suicide is the fourth leading cause of death in adults from 18 to 65 years of age and the third leading cause of death for America's youth today. He said suicide rates in the military increased to an average of one suicide per day in 2012.

"One suicide is too many," said Sessoms. "It is our responsibility, our moral obligation to work together and bring an end to one of the most urgent problems facing Americans: suicide."

Twenty clinically licensed counselors were present at the event to provide information, talk with participants and respond to questions and concerns about depression and suicide. The walk aims to raise awareness about suicide as an issue and educate people about the warning signs.

"I wish that I had known about some of the things they put out as far as what signs and things to look for because maybe I could have helped save my brother," said Hospital Corpsman 1st Class Bryant K. Hare, stationed aboard USS Enterprise (CVN 65). "But it does help finding someone you're comfortable talking with, finding people who have dealt with the same situations and finding someone you can relate to."

The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP) and Hampton Roads Survivors of Suicide Support Group have helped organize and support the event for 25 years. The AFSP is the country's leading not-for-profit organization and is exclusively dedicated to preventing suicide and assisting people who have been affected by suicide.

During registration for the walk, colored ribbons were handed out to be worn as armbands to symbolize a specific person to be remembered. Silver armbands represented supporters raising

awareness; blue bands represented those who lost a spouse to suicide, green for a lost brother or sister, yellow for an extended family member, red for those who lost a parent and purple for the loss of a son or daughter.

"Look around, you see so many colored ribbons," said Chris Gilchrist, the founder of Hampton Roads Survivors of Suicide Support Group. "They bind us together as a community, as we share compassion, as we share hope."

A remembrance wall was covered in photos and memorabilia to remember those who lost their battle with depression.

Participants in the walk took group photos, decorated Frisbees, made paper cranes and enjoyed a picnic with live music and free Italian ice.

More than 30 Navy teams participated in the walk, carrying banners, and wearing team shirts. Many of the teams were started by command chapters of the Coalition of Sailors Against Destructive Decisions (CSADD).

Kimberly Gleason, AFSP Eastern Division Director, said that Walk Out of Darkness events are held across the nation. Last year the Hampton Roads Walk Out of Darkness event had the nation's biggest turnout.

"This event will be the largest in the nation yet again this year," said Gleason. "This is important because the more people we reach before they decide suicide is their only alternative, the more we'll be able to show them options. And once a person knows that there are options, the less likely they are to end their life."

Information about suicide prevention is available from the following agencies: National Suicide Prevention Lifeline 1-800-273-TALK (8255); National Community Walks, www.afsp.org; International Association For Suicide Prevention; and at the Navy Suicide Prevention Program Webpage: www.suicide.navy.mil.

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